

COOKING FRESH

BY NIKKI BATSFORD

Spring is a period of rejuvenation. As the ground thaws and the days become longer, the land begins to bloom with the first signs of new life. Finally, fruits and vegetables begin to peek out from newborn plants and are soon ready to be plucked and enjoyed. Such crisp, colorful produce provides a refreshing change from winter's slim harvest.

The season's mild weather sets a perfect mood for a visit to your neighborhood farmstand. There you'll find homegrown leafy greens, newly gathered every morning. Fresh herbs can replace the dried seasonings in your pantry; a parsley bunch surely imparts superior flavor to a dinner of local seafood. For a quick dessert, sliced strawberries and sweetened whipped cream spruce up a pound cake. Now is the perfect time to savor nature's bounty.

SPRING COOKING FRESH LIST PRODUCE

Apples (stored), Arugula, Asparagus, Bok choy, Broccoli, Broccoli rabe, Brussels sprouts, Carrots, Chives, Chinese broccoli, Cilantro, Collards, Cranberries (stored), Dill, Fava beans, Fennel, Garlic (stored), Ginger, Gourds (stored), Kale, Kohlrabi, Lavender, Leeks, Lemon verbena, Lettuce, Mint, Mushrooms, Onions (stored), Oregano, Parsley, Parsnips (stored), Peas, Potatoes (stored), Radicchio, Radishes, Ramps, Rosemary, Rhubarb, Salad greens, Sage, Scallions, Shallots (stored), Spinach, String beans, Strawberries, Tat soi, Thyme

SWEETENERS

Maple syrup, Honey

SEAFOOD

American eel, Butterfish, Cod, Clams, Dogfish, Flounder, Haddock, Hake, Lobster, Mackerel, Monkfish, Mussels, Oysters, Scallops (bay and sea), Striped bass, Skate, Tilefish, Tuna, Whelk, Whiting

MEAT, POULTRY & DAIRY

Beef, Chicken, Duck, Lamb, Eggs, Milk, Cheese

RECIPE

RISI E BISI WITH PROSCIUTTO DI PARMA

*From Executive Chef Brian Kingsford,
Bacaro Restaurant, Providence*

Soffrito:

1½ Tbsp olive oil
3 ounces pancetta
1 clove garlic, chopped
1 medium onion, peeled and diced
2 carrots, peeled and diced
1 stalk celery, peeled and diced
2 sprigs fresh thyme

Riso:

2 cups Arborio rice, unwashed
3 quarts (12 cups) low sodium chicken stock, reduced to 8 cups
Kosher salt
4 Tbsp unsalted butter
2 cups fresh peas, blanched for 2 minutes
1 tsp finely grated lemon peel, plus additional for garnish
Freshly ground black pepper
¾ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
6 pieces prosciutto di Parma, thinly sliced
Extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbsp flat-leaf parsley, washed, dried and chopped

Soffrito: In medium skillet over medium-high heat, add olive oil and pancetta, stirring until pancetta starts to become crispy, approximately 5 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté 3 minutes. Add the onion, carrots, celery and whole thyme sprigs; cook and stir about 5 minutes until onion is soft and translucent. Remove mixture from pan to cool. Remove thyme twigs.

Riso: Preheat the oven to 475 degrees. Heat 3-quart lidded casserole dish with flame-proof bottom over medium heat; add the soffrito and sauté until heated through. Add the rice and continue to sauté for an additional 2 minutes. Add 3 cups of the simmering chicken stock, 2 tablespoons butter and 2½ teaspoons salt; bring to a full boil.

Place the lid on the casserole dish and place in oven for 8 minutes. Remove casserole from the oven and stir the rice. Add 2 additional cups simmering chicken stock. Cover casserole and return to oven for 7 minutes. Remove casserole from the oven and add peas, grated lemon peel and remaining 2 tablespoons butter. Stir the rice and season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Add additional simmering chicken stock as needed to create a soupy dish. If necessary, return the casserole to the oven until the rice is tender to the bite but slightly firm in the center. Stir in the Parmigiano-Reggiano. Lay the prosciutto over the top and drizzle with olive oil. Garnish with additional lemon zest and parsley and serve. Serves 4 as a main course.

WINE PAIRING

Planeta La Segreta Bianco 2006. A Sicilian white blend with a distinct richness and some nice tropical flavors.

Newport Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc 2006. A dry crisp white wine with light grapefruit and citrus aromas and flavors.

—Mark Gasbarro of Gasbarro's Wines, Providence

MEYER LEMON TART

*From Chef/Owner Steven Liebhauser,
Slice of Heaven, Jamestown*

Tart Shell:

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
½ cup granulated sugar
Finely grated peel of 1 Meyer lemon
Juice of 1 Meyer lemon (about 3 Tbsp)
2 cups all-purpose flour
1/8 tsp salt

Meyer Lemon Cream:

8 eggs
1¼ cups granulated sugar
Finely grated peel of 2 Meyer lemons
Juice of 8 Meyer lemons (1¼ cups)
1 cup heavy cream

Tart Shell: Place the butter, sugar, grated lemon peel and lemon juice in the bowl of an electric mixer and cream on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. Reduce the speed to low and add the flour and salt, mixing just until combined. Pat the dough into a flat disk and wrap it in plastic. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Roll the chilled dough between 2 sheets of wax paper into a 10-inch circle to fit into a 9-inch tart pan with a removable bottom. Chill 15 minutes and then invert dough into tart pan, removing the wax paper. Prick bottom of tart shell with fork. Refrigerate the prepared tart shell for 30 minutes.

Line tart shell with aluminum foil and fill with pie weights or dried beans. Bake the chilled tart shell for 30 minutes. Remove pie weights and foil and bake for an additional 10 minutes. Cool completely.

Meyer Lemon Cream: Place the eggs and sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer and whisk on high speed for 3 minutes. Reduce the speed to medium and whisk in the grated lemon peel and lemon juice. Continue mixing for 1 minute. Reduce the speed to low and whisk in the heavy cream, mixing just until combined. Allow the mixture to sit for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 250 degrees.

Final Assembly: Skim off and discard the foam from the surface of the lemon cream. Place baked tart shell on lined sheet pan and fill shell with lemon cream almost to the top. Place in the middle oven rack. Bake until the center is just set, about 50 minutes. Cool to room temperature before serving. Serves 8.

WINE PAIRING

Selaks Ice Wine 2005. Selaks is a superb sweet wine from New Zealand. It has optimum balance between fruit sweetness and crisp, clean acidity. Flavors of marmalade, dried apricots and honey linger on the palate in a finish that is deliciously sweet.

Chateau Coutet 2003. Classified as a first growth, this is a huge, rich, opulent sweet wine with essence of plums and apricots. In its youth it still exhibits all of the above, but with a strong backbone of acidity that balances out the sweetness.

—Elliott N. Fishbein of *Town Wine & Spirits, Rumford*

CRISPY MARINATED TUNA WITH SOY DIPPING SAUCE

*From Executive Chef Paul Shire,
Restaurant Oak, Providence*

1 shallot, finely diced
½ carrot, finely diced
1 tsp minced garlic
1 Tbsp minced fresh ginger
1 tsp chopped fresh cilantro
¼ cup soy sauce
1 Tbsp rice wine
2 pounds tuna loin, cut into 4-ounce strips
2 cups panko
¼ cup peanut oil

In a nonreactive mixing bowl, mix shallot, carrot, garlic, ginger, cilantro, soy sauce and rice wine until combined; set half the marinade aside. Marinate the tuna strips in the remaining sauce for 20 minutes. Remove tuna from marinade. Dredge each piece in panko, coating evenly.

Heat peanut oil in a 12-inch skillet over a medium-high heat. Fry tuna in the heated oil until the desired doneness is reached, flipping the pieces halfway through. Remove the cooked tuna from the pan and stick each with a bamboo skewer for serving, if desired. Serve with reserved sauce for dipping. Serves 4 as an appetizer.

WINE PAIRING

Trimbach Pinot Blanc. This wine is made from 100 percent Pinot Blanc grapes. Trimbach Pinot Blanc is soft and fruity, ready to drink within months of the vintage with a pleasing freshness that enhances most foods.

d'Arenberg "The Hermit Crab" Viognier Marsanne. This blend of two d'Arenberg's "Great White Hopes" has a green, brilliant mid-straw color and exhibits fresh and tropical fruit with a strong emphasis on stone fruits, pineapple, mango and honeysuckle.

—Marnie Crawford of *Grapes & Gourmet, Jamestown*

Photo by Chip Riegel